

May 12, 1954

Dr. David L. Nanney
Department of Zoology
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Mich.

Dear Nanney:

I have your letter of the 11th on Markert's suspension. I had read of this in the newspapers, though very few details were given— still too few for me to form any final opinion, especially as I am not personally acquainted with Markert except for a brief introduction.

I cannot myself subscribe to the circular that you sent, but will be happy to submit it to my colleagues here for their own consideration. I would be very dubious of the usefulness of such testimonial petitions in any event.

My own reservations are directed to the logic of the circular and, more important, to Markert's action before the committee. I can sympathize with the dilemma that he must have found himself in (assuming his innocence, until otherwise proven, of any recent crime), but I cannot approve of his decision to refuse to testify. This response has done immeasurable harm to the academic community and to the country, as well as to the individuals directly involved. At the least, it plays into the hands of the politicians who capitalize on hysterical fear of communism by justifying the imputation of subversion and concealment. If Markert would testify, he would command a respect on my part (and others') that he now forfeits.

The circular suggests that Markert's scientific reputation has some bearing on his intellectual integrity in non-scientific matters. My personal experience of other scientists does not support the necessity of such a correlation, on the one hand, and the world's experience with some (fortunately very few) scientists in Nazi Germany and with Klaus Fuchs, is too proximate, on the other. Finally, a possible corollary of the last sentence is that agreement with lyсенkist conclusions was a mark of treason; I do not agree with this party-line reasoning even in a negative sense. If I were acquainted with Markert, I would be happy to offer a character assessment, but it is a delusion to extrapolate from scientific performance.

Of course, the faculty and Administration will weigh this consideration in his favor: I assume he would not have been appointed in the first place if his abilities were not properly estimated. But I do not think President Hatcher will give much weight to my hope that refusal to testify does not make out a prima facie case for dismissal. ~~However, anaphans rights and that every~~ man has a right to be judged according to the legal processes of our democratic tradition

on scientific eminence and capability: they should be the due of the least talented of our citizens.

Again may I urge that every good office be made to Markert to induce him to testify. How else can the chain of suspicion be broken? As matters stand now, A,B,C... each refuse to testify largely to protect each other, but the only ones who profit are the occasional zealots still willing to take the law into their own hands (like Fuchs) and the political opportunists. Confronted with concerted refusals, the public has little recourse but to suspect that more than "past political affiliations and activities" are involved.

I would have no objection to your transmitting these remarks (intact) as you may see fit.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg